

# The Census and You

**Objective:** To understand the reasons why the census is taken.

## Background Information:

- The census is a count of the entire population of the United States. It occurs every ten years — always in a year ending in zero — and is required by the U.S. Constitution.
- The first U.S. census was taken in 1790 and yielded a count of nearly 4 million; 100 years later that number was approximately 63 million and by 1990 approximately 248 million.
- The census count determines the number of congressional representatives apportioned to each state.
- Census numbers are used to redraw the boundaries of state legislative districts and, in some cases, local voting districts.
- The Census Bureau estimates that in the 1990 Census, information was not reported for about 8 million people, and for about 4 million people, it was reported twice. The undercount was higher for minority populations and young children. Some people did not participate in the 1990 Census because they were afraid of or distrusted the government; some did not understand the purpose and benefits of the census; some did not care; some did not know they were required to respond; and some did not read English well enough to fill out the form.
- Census 2000 will be the government's information cornerstone for the next decade. Census numbers help determine the distribution of more than \$185 billion of federal funds to state and local governments each year.
- Businesses also use census figures in their planning and decision making — for example, to plan investments, analyze trends, and understand consumer needs.
- Community leaders use census numbers for everything from planning schools and building roads to providing recreational opportunities and managing healthcare services.

## Extension Activity

Ask students if they have had any prior involvement with a census, either in the U.S. or another country. What was their experience like?

Have students place Activity Sheet 1 in their Census Booklets.

## Getting Started:

Draw an analogy for your students between planning a meal and taking a census. When planning a meal, you need to know how many people you will be serving so you can buy and prepare the right amount of food. The census counts all the people in the country so that the government can figure out what programs and services — such as adult education and ESL centers — are needed and where.

## Using the Activity Sheet:

1. Photocopy and distribute Activity Sheet 1.
2. Introduce and define the concept of the census, explaining it as a complete count of every person living in the United States. All people are counted regardless of their age, the language they speak, where they live, and whether they are citizens.
3. Read “The Census and You” aloud while students follow along. Ask students to practice reading the passage aloud to a partner.
4. Ask students to review statements 1–6 and fill in the blanks with the correct word(s) from the word bank. Review the answers as a class.

## Census Information Booklet:

Show students how to create their Census Information Booklets. These booklets will be used like scrapbooks to collect and display lesson materials, including activity sheets, and as reference tools which students can consult again and again. Encourage students to share their booklets with family and friends.

## Summary:

Census 2000 offers a chance to make sure the new century begins with an accurate picture of each community and its needs. Every person is counted regardless of age, place of birth, or language — citizen and noncitizen alike.

## Answers, p. 3:

1. United States
2. noncitizens
3. ten
4. services
5. stores
6. undercount

# The Census and You

The Census counts every person living in the United States. It counts citizens and noncitizens, the young and the old, workers and nonworkers. This spring you'll have a chance to fill out the census form. This opportunity comes only once every ten years.

Filling out the census form can help make your neighborhood a better place. That's because the government uses census numbers to decide how to spend money for schools, playgrounds, roads, hospitals, housing, and other things. Some groups use census numbers to plan community services. Businesses use census numbers to decide where to open new stores.

During the last census, in 1990, almost five million people were not counted because they did not complete and return their census forms. This is called an undercount. When people are not counted, some communities may get less money from the government than they deserve. Do not let this happen to your community. Make sure that you and everyone in your home are counted. Remember to fill out your census form and mail it back.

1. The census counts all the people in the \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The census counts both citizens and \_\_\_\_\_.
3. There is a census in the United States every \_\_\_\_\_ years.
4. Some groups use census numbers to plan community \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Businesses use census numbers to decide where to open \_\_\_\_\_.
6. In 1990 there was an \_\_\_\_\_ of almost five million people.

## WORD BANK

ten  
United States

stores  
undercount

noncitizens  
services